

FADE UP

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Sunlight turns to gloom as it filters down through a weighty canopy of ancient trees and tangled underbrush. The sound of something moving through the brush is heard.

A man's burn-scarred right hand clears brush unveiling an iron-jaw trap mean with rust and oil. Empty.

JAKE BARNETT, 40, dressed in worn farm overalls and boots and carrying a shotgun inspects the scattered collection of broken sticks. Jake is very slender. His long, ragged brown hair is chopped into a mullet. A week's growth of beard dirties his otherwise handsome face. Jake rigs the sticks up over the trap. He pulls out a small container of peanut butter and gobs up the end of a stick over the trap.

Overhead a squirrel leaps across the tree canopy. Jake searches his empty pockets and finds a lone shotgun shell. He kisses the shell and jams it into his shotgun. Rapid breathing. Trembling aim. Something moves over his foot. A SNAKE! Jake jumps. The shotgun roars. The squirrel scampers away unharmed. The snake slithers into the underbrush.

EXT. FIELDS - LATER

Jake trudges over a barren crop totting his gun and a burlap bag holding something. Ahead in the distance squat shadowy figures fronting a beat up house trailer.

EXT. JAKE'S PROPERTY - LATER

Jake passes the shadowy figures - a dozen headstones of the family burial plot. Two sites are marked only by cinder blocks. To one side of the trailer is a fire-blackened stone chimney - half devoured by the undergrowth - and the last identifiable remains of what was once a house. To the other side of the trailer is an enclosed pig wallow, a small barn and a couple old utility shacks.

Jake tosses the sack and gun on the trailer porch.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

The the old barn is crammed with rusty farming implements. An area of the barn is railed off and filled with straw. Suspended from the ceiling hangs a sign reading "Janet" burnt into the wood.

A sow appears grunting a welcome to Jake.

JAKE

I know. I know. But we got some of
Jake's famous corn bread heading
your way. You just give me a few
minutes whip her up for you.

Jake enters the pen. Pets the pig.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You my girl, Janet. How's our Rusty?

Jake finds the boar lying on his side, it's breathing labored.
Jake pets Rusty as he examines him.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - LATER

Jake measures out cornmeal into a cup but runs out.

He tosses the box in the trash on top of an empty flour sack.
He opens his pantry. Nearly empty. He pulls out a box of
grits and tops off the cornmeal and adds to the flour in a
bowl.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

Jake sits near a half-opened window absentmindedly stirring
cornmeal. Overhead a strip of flypaper hangs limp with the
weight of dozens of flies.

A fly buzzes between the window glass and screen. The sill
is covered with the carcasses of dead flies. Jake encourages
the fly to fly down to escape

JAKE

Down. You got to go down.

The fly doesn't get it. Jake hefts the window fully open.
The fly escapes. Jake swats at it knocking the fly paper
strip into the cornbread mixture.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - LATER

Jake puts a skillet of cornbread into the oven. He dumps
the contents of the burlap bag onto a cutting board - the
snake, decapitated.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - EVENING

Jake eats his meal. Snake, cornbread (with flies), collard
greens.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - LATER

Jake mixes up a bucket of cornbread, evaporated milk, greens
and pot licker. He spoons on powdered vitamins.

Suddenly a BURST OF PIG SQUEALING sounds. Jake hustles out of the trailer with the bucket of slop.

EXT. JAKE'S PROPERTY - MOMENTS LATER

Janet is at the fence of the pig wallow squealing like crazy. Jake hurries into the barn.

EXT. JAKE'S PROPERTY - NIGHT

In the harsh glare of an industrial lamp, Jake operates some odd winch with a cable leading into the barn. An electrical generator sputters and rumbles in the background.

A moment later the cable drags the pig formerly known as Rusty out of the barn by its hind hooves.

INT. SMOKEHOUSE - DAY

Rusty's gutted carcass is suspended by a hook in the high-ceiling. Off to the side intestines soak in a washtub. Outside comes the ROAR of the generator kicking on.

Jake enters. He wipes sweat from his brow. He operates pulleys and cables to lower the carcass onto a huge butchering table. Jake grabs an electric saw and fires it up.

EXT. JAKE'S DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Cicada's scream from their hiding places along the forgotten county road. Jake pulls mail from his mailbox. A sign near the road reads "THE BARNETT'S". Scrawled in hand is added "IS CURSED". Jake returns down the long dirt driveway cut through brush and trees. Deep down in the darkness the trailer is shrouded by smoke from the smoke house.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - AFTERNOON

Jake puts on a Hank Williams cassette. He goes through his mail - all pieces addressed to "Occupant".

There's an advertisement for a sale on women's clothes. A house cleaning service. A brochure from "Rest Secure Forever," selling home grave site security systems. The last is for MABLEY MANSIONS "LIVE LIKE A MILLIONAIRE IN MABLEY".

EXT. JAKE'S PROPERTY - AFTERNOON

A sheriff's car breaks through the overgrown driveway and parks beside a stripped, rusted-out pickup truck on blocks.

The SHERIFF, a tall, powerfully built, black man, steps out and strides toward the thick smoke rising from the smoke

house past the ancient chimney with it's strange, distinctive Gothic emblem metal-worked into the blackened stone.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER

Jake puts the real estate flyer on his refrigerator next to an old photograph of a beaming Jake, a beautiful blonde girl with a look of panic in her eyes and a baby in her arms, and Jake's mother, a woman worn out beyond her years.

He looks around. Pig figurines, pig stuff everywhere - the mess. Then he TURNS UP THE MUSIC.

EXT. JAKE'S PROPERTY/BURIAL PLOT

The Sheriff stands with hat in hands staring at the cinder blocks. Hearing the music he turns and strides for the trailer.

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER

Jake is dancing to the music. He's actually quite good and in a manner all his own.

EXT. JAKE'S TRAILER

Sheriff raps on the trailer door. No answer.

SHERIFF

Jake!

The sheriff looks at the bare electric wiring connected to the trailer.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Jake Barnett!

The trailer door swings open.

JAKE

Sheriff.

SHERIFF

Had a call about smoke coming from your property. Report was it was considerable.

Jake looks nervous and stammers...

JAKE

Well, Sheriff, ain't nothin' but... see what happened was...

Pause.

SHERIFF

(lightly)

Was hoping you had a barbecue going.

EXT. JAKE'S TRAILER - LATER

Jake grills ribs over makeshift oil-drum barbecue. Sheriff tries to relax in a wobbling chair. Jake hoists a bottle of soda.

JAKE

I do love Bubble Up. Nose to toes I do.

SHERIFF

Good stuff.

JAKE

Thanks for it, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

You bet.

JAKE

You bring me those beans you brung we get them cozied up next to Rusty here.

Sheriff struggles out of the chair. Fetches a bag of food.

SHERIFF

Hope you're not put out I picked up these go alongs.

JAKE

Shoot no. Fact is I'm a bit low this moment.

SHERIFF

Didn't want to put you out. Also didn't want to miss out if indeed you had something going out here.

JAKE

You know I ain't put out, Sheriff. You always welcome. Shoot, we got us enough Rusty here feed half of Mabley County.

SHERIFF

Eat with Jake, you eatin' good. That's what I tell everyone. There's another sack in the troller I want you to have. Flour, rice, eggs. Not much.

Jake accepts the charity without comment. Sheriff hands container of beans to Jake.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

This here Rusty?

JAKE

Passed on us a couple nights ago.

SHERIFF

So how many head you down to? Didn't see any others earlier.

JAKE

Hogs generally keep themselves inside when you're smoking or barbecuing.

SHERIFF

Makes sense.

JAKE

Down to Janet.

Long pause as Sheriff considers the weight of this.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Was hopin' to continue her line. Why I got Rusty here. This Janet, she Janet Number Four. Her mama Janet Number Three. Her mama Janet Number 2. Her mama I got way back when I gone to work for Ol' Bill Parsons after my daddy... Well you know about that.

(pause)

Janet Four give us plenty to love and I'm confident plenty of folks had some quality family time, as they say, gracing over her little 'uns. Figured I'd get Janet Five from Rusty's litter but reckon I got pinched. Well, we can't be countin' on the Good Lord's blessings for everything and it ain't Rusty's fault nor the feller who sold me him, I guess, that Rusty got no nut. He go'ed at it, him and Janet, but in the end they was fruitless and he got the flu and here we are gracin' over his time on this Earth.

Jake plates the ribs.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Tote them beans inside with me
Sheriff?

INT. JAKE'S TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

Jake and Sheriff have their heads bowed in prayer.

JAKE

Thank you for giving us Rusty to
nourish and sustain us. And for the
bean plants and potato plants and
the effort put into their goodness
and the wood we used for smoking and
cooking which by golly we are truly
blessed and all what's too long a
list to get through but you know
what I mean, and by that I mean all
of it. Thank you for sending the
Sheriff of Mabley County to be my
guest. That'd be Jake Barnett.
Amen.

SHERIFF

Amen.

They raise their heads. The Sheriff is trying not to laugh.

JAKE

What is it, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

I don't know... you just got a way,
Jake.

JAKE

I got a way?

SHERIFF

You're funny. Kind of crazy.

Jake cringes at the "crazy" comment.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

You're different. Good different.

The men dig in to the food.

JAKE

Sad a feller gets so hungry even
this old boar tastes good.

SHERIFF

Figure you'll sell him off?

JAKE

Naw. Rusty won't pass inspection.
But reckon he'll tide me over until
I can get Janet a new beau or maybe
buy a bred gilt, get me up and
running.

SHERIFF

Black folk were lucky to get pork at
all when I was a kid. Maybe
Christmas. Rusty's right fine by
me.

JAKE

Well you probably won't confuse me
with Santy Claus but you're welcome
to as much as you like, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

Why you stay out here, Jake, all by
yourself? If you don't mind me
asking.

JAKE

Never gave it much mind, I guess.

SHERIFF

There's plenty of ladies love to be
with a decent man. Especially one
who cooks like this. Why I know of a
real nice gal be falling all over
herself to get to know you. Give me
your phone. Let's give her a call.

JAKE

Oh, that phone just for show. It
don't call. Besides, I'm married.

SHERIFF

Married. Well, yes and no. Been
twenty years.

JAKE

Yeah.

SHERIFF

But, well, you been through your
ordeal. You more than been punished.

Jake instinctively rubs his burnt right hand.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

And helped.

Jake sets his jaw, angered.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

You might not be here. Or anywhere without that time. All I'm saying is you should be with someone. Share your life.

JAKE

Well, thing is, Sheriff I am married and there's two sticklers in that. One is I can't be married to two gals at one time, can I? Lessin' the laws changed.

SHERIFF

Well that's true but...

JAKE

Two is, like my mama used to say, I'd be making a bee-line straight to Hades on rocket powered roller skates. Things just fine the way they are. Besides no gal want to come down here deal with this mess, these ghosts and frankly ain't met too many got my love of hogs. And that's important in a relationship. I read. I seen that in magazines. One requisite for lasting bonds between a man and woman is common interests.

SHERIFF

(giving in)

You're right. I'm sorry. I'm a guest in your home and it ain't my business how you live.

Pause.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Another Bubble Up?

JAKE

Sure.

Sheriff opens the refrigerator. Empty except the soda pop and milk and eggs he brought Jake. He opens the bottles puts them on the table and studies Jake who carefully tasting the potato salad.

SHERIFF

As good a potato salad as I know. Odella Faye's. She'd made up a big bowl sold me this after I doused out her and Bobby's latest dispute.

(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
 Figured it go with what you'd be
 barbecuing.

Jake continues dissecting the recipe, burning it to memory.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
 You remember them, don't you?

JAKE
 Who?

SHERIFF
 Bobby and Odella Faye Haxley.

JAKE
 Don't reckon...

SHERIFF
 No. Jake, shoot you remember back
 when we were in school. The dances
 at the community hall?

JAKE
 Sure.

SHERIFF
 The dance off! The famous dance off
 with you and Janet Applegate squaring
 off with Bobby Haxley and Odella
 Faye Rancey.

JAKE
 He's black and she's white?

SHERIFF
 That's right. Still stirs folks up.

JAKE
 Where I met my wife first time...

Jake drifts away. Saddens.

SHERIFF
 Pretty girl.

JAKE
 A jewel. Didn't like pork chop.

SHERIFF
 Hogs?

JAKE
 Them neither.

Sheriff looks around the messy trailer that probably hasn't changed much in twenty years. He sees the realty flyer on the refrigerator. He reaches in his pocket then reconsiders.

SHERIFF

Mighty good potato salad.

JAKE

I'll make it for you next time you come out you want.

EXT. JAKE'S TRAILER - EVENING

Sheriff waits for Jake to return from the smoke house with something heavy in a burlap bag.

JAKE

Here you go, Sheriff. All yours.

SHERIFF

You sure you want to let go of this?

JAKE

Never have cared for heads. You know, after the fact.

SHERIFF

Well the Missus will be mighty obliged. She's good with head cheese. And that's about it.

Sheriff reaches in a pocket and pulls out an envelope.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Look, another reason I come out here, Jake, was to give you this here. It's the final notice on your property tax bill. County don't want to take action. This property's been in your family a long time.

JAKE

Two hundred years, roundabouts.

SHERIFF

As I said, they don't want to take it but they will so you got to pay it. Soon, I'm afraid to say.

Jake opens the bill, reads.

JAKE

Doozy.

SHERIFF

You are in a bit of a pickle. Not a lot of work these days. County keeps punching holes up it's belt. Downtown's pretty dead... Oh! That flyer on your icebox - Mabley Mansions - plenty of construction going on with them. Maybe you can hook up there.

JAKE

A job?

SHERIFF

Well, yeah.

JAKE

But I'm a pig farmer. I'd do farming farming too if anything could grow on this land but it don't.

SHERIFF

I know, Jake. Just not seeing a lot of options here. Mabley Mansions. Out on the north end of the county. Be a hike but...

Jake is glum.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

You work it out. Thanks again for the delicious supper and the head.

Sheriff notes the bare electrical wire attached to the trailer.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Probably ought to fix that wire there.

JAKE

Squirrels. They like to gnaw.

SHERIFF

True to their nature.

JAKE

Yep.

SHERIFF

Well, thanks again and good luck.

JAKE

Good of you to stop by. I'll see ya.

Sheriff pulls his car out leaving Jake alone in the dying light.

INT. OFFICE TRAILER - DAY

Office for the Mabley Mansion construction project. Jake has shaved for the job interview and wears a clean but worn pair of overalls. He drinks coffee from a styrofoam cup. His attention shifts from a tray of donuts to a small television that plays softly in the background to The GENERAL CONTRACTOR who is looking over his application.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

You've been a resident of the county your entire life then?

JAKE

Yes, sir.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Farm work mostly?

JAKE

Yes, sir. Got a little pig farm but looking for something a little better paying in these hard times.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Hard times... So you've worked with tools on your farm - nail guns, power drills, the like?

JAKE

Pretty good with a hammer. Saw. Ax. I mean I can pretty much handle anything you got for me to do.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Okay, Mr. Barnett. I'm going to talk with the foreman. He'll know exactly what's needed in the way of labor.

JAKE

Yes, sir.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Sure you don't want a donut? Don't want them to go to waste. Have one.

Jake takes a donut.

JAKE

Thank you.

(MORE)